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On a mission to save a hospital



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

About 80 people attend a meeting about the planned closure of Port Colborne hospital. Please see story Page 2.

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UPFRONT

Referendum on agenda to save hospital

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

A provincewide referendum could make it "politically impossible" to close hospitals, says an Ontario Health Coalition board member.

Doug Allan said a "referendum" the coalition is planning will "make it so that these cuts, and the threatened closure of the Port Colborne hospital, can be stopped — to make it politically impossible for that to happen."

Allan, a Thorold area resident, told a group of about 80 people at the Guild Hall in Port Colborne last Wednesday night that "saving your hospital will be like a beacon for the rest of the province of what a community can do that stands up for it."

Some details about a referendum were released during a media conference Monday. The initiative will include ballot boxes in 100 public locations in communities across Ontario, such as businesses, municipal offices and physician clinics and workplaces.

Although petitions bearing tens of thousands of signatures submitted to the provincial government in recent years have failed to stop the province's plans for Niagara hospitals, Hotte said the scope of the referendum should allow it to garner far more response.

Hotté said it will have a profound impact on the provincial government.

Allan said similar provincewide campaigns have had significant impacts in the past, such as stopping health-care privatization plans.

He said the most recent re-



ALLAN BENNER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Ontario Health Coalition board member Doug Allan speaks at a meeting to discuss efforts to save Port Colborne hospital.

ferendum the Ontario coalition organized petition to allow private clinics to conduct some hospital surgeries, "and we collected 100,000 votes on an issue that I don't think is quite as well known as the cuts to our hospitals."

The meeting was organized to discuss the provincial government's plans to close hospitals in Port Colborne, Welland, Niagara Falls and Fort Erie and

need to do it collectively right across the province and said, "I think we can send an extremely loud message in Port Colborne because of the circumstances that we're looking at here."

The meeting was organized to discuss the provincial government's plans to close hospitals in Port Colborne, Welland, Niagara Falls and Fort Erie and

replace them with a single new hospital in Niagara Falls. Niagara Health System is in e-mail to Postmedia last Tuesday said Angela Zangari, executive vice-president and project lead, and NHS president Suzanne Johnston, "have been across all NHS sites over the past few weeks sharing the preferred designs for a new south hospital at Lyons Creek and Montrose roads

and a new ambulatory care/urgent care and long-term care development in Welland at King and Third streets."

"We believe it is important to share information with our staff, many of whom have been engaged in planning activity for the project."

"Dr. Johnston is committed to working with staff to discuss planning on a regular basis. In addition she will be continu-

ing to meet with community leaders to plan forward."

At last Wednesday's coalition meeting, several residents shared concerns about access to health-care services, including Aubrey Foley.

"I live in Welland, anyone from Welland, but I live in Port Colborne, my hospital is in Port Colborne and this is where it should remain," the 71-year-old said.

He said his city of 19,000 people has a "deplorable walk-in service for health care."

"It is not acceptable. There is no reason for it to be the way it is today," he said, while noting Dunnville, a town of 11,000 people, has a "fully functional hospital with free parking."

"If Dunnville can do that, we can do this very easily," Foley said.

Former mayor and regional councillor Bob Saracino said he will do whatever he can to save the Welland hospital, but the community must also work together to keep the urgent care centre running in Port Colborne.

"When it comes to health, we must be one," he said.

Saracino said health care "is not a privilege, but it is a fundamental right that we have under the Canada Health Act."

While Hotté said she agrees Niagara Falls needs a new hospital, "it should not be at the expense of Welland, Wainfleet, Pelham — over 94,000 people losing access to hospital services."

"No way! We need to keep the hospital open and access to services," Hotté said.

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LOCAL NEWS

Affordable housing hope on the horizon

MARYANN FIRTH
Postmedia Network

It will take more than a vision to end homelessness in Niagara. However, change is within reach.

That was the message Michael Shapcott brought to regional council chambers last Thursday as he spoke about the Canadian housing crisis and work that can be done to address issues of affordable housing and homelessness seen locally.

"We want to have a plan, not a dream, and we want to start driving that plan forward," the community-based housing expert and long-time member of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness said during a public presentation sponsored by the Social Justice Reform Network of Niagara.

The first step to creating a course of action is to clearly define the issue locally, Shapcott advised the crowd.

"If you don't clearly define the problem, you will not be able to work toward a solution."

He detailed the path homelessness has taken in Canada from a modest spike in the 1990s. At the time, the increase not only in the number of people who were homeless, but also in the type of people, he said. Homelessness in the 1990s predominantly included middle-aged men. In the decade that followed, families and a large number of seniors were finding themselves without shelter — a trend that contin-

ues today.

Before solutions can be put in place, Shapcott said there needs to be a solid understanding of the path to homelessness, which can often include financial difficulties, domestic abuse and mental illness.

Complex issues such as homelessness and affordable housing require more complex solutions that may touch on a number of community sectors.

"We have to move from a 'one size fits all' to a 'one size fits none' approach. What we do need is everyone on the table," he said, adding all levels of government, the private and non-profit sectors and the community each have a role to play in understanding and tackling distinct local needs. He called that collaboration key to "changing the conversation" and putting an action plan in place.

Shapcott expressed hope that change is on the horizon.

He was optimistic about the federal government's recent budget commitment to consult with advocacy groups and create a national housing strategy.

"It's important to be a part of that discussion," he said, calling it a move that is desperately needed, as Canada has a "severe shortage of affordable and social housing in every part of the country."

It's projected that by 2017, the number of affordable homes in Canada will drop to 492,500 from 626,300 in 2007, Shapcott said.

Despite the housing stock decreasing, waiting lists continue to grow, as they have



Michael Shapcott, recognized as one of the nation's leading community-based housing experts, speaks to a large crowd gathered in Niagara Region council chamber.

MARYANN FIRTH/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

annually since the 2008 recession.

"We're cutting 22 per cent of our national housing stock and waitlists are growing to unprecedented levels," he said. "No wonder we have a housing crisis. No wonder we have people spilling into the streets."

Shapcott credited the provincial and federal governments for their recent budgets, which included some, though not enough, funding dollars to support affordable housing.

Both budgets, he said, also recognized housing as a fundamental need for all Canadians, marking a change in government mindset.

"We can't continue to cut and divide and say one group is more deserving than another. Everyone has a right to housing."

There has also been recognition by the Ontario and Canadian governments that expertise needs to be brought to the table to properly address the

problem.

It's critical that Niagara bring forward information on what government can do to meet the region's specific needs, Shapcott said.

"People need to think nationally and act locally ... Identify practical local initiatives that can be taken forward."

"We for sure know you don't have to start from scratch," Shapcott said, adding Niagara has a "good history" of promoting advocacy and introducing

initiatives.

He spoke about a project underway in Toronto that involves converting surplus school board properties into affordable housing.

It's a potential option Niagara Regional Housing has also been recently reviewing.

There are challenges to overcome to make that a reality, he said, with school boards often feeling it's their duty to get top dollar for their properties, which housing organizations are typically unable to pay.

But solutions, such as land trusts that separate ownership of land and buildings, do exist, making it a viable option, he added.

SAARN chairwoman Graeme Janes said Niagara has been "working on a plan" to address affordable housing and homelessness issues locally.

She noted the recent homelessness count that took place throughout Niagara in April, during which a small army of volunteers worked to gather information directly from Niagara's homeless, including those on the streets and in local shelters.

"We're getting to know the community in the right way."

Janes said Shapcott's presentation inspiring and said there were many ideas he brought forward that local advocates will look at potentially introducing in the community.

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The life of God in the soul of man

PASTOR GARY TOMBURK
Wainfleet Congregational
Christian Church

I don't think that anyone can improve upon describing the essence of one's salvation than these words do: life of God in the soul of a man. I can't take credit for those words as much as I would like to think that they are the title of a book of the same name written by the early Puritan Henry Scougal. When you think about the life of God, what words come into your mind?

In His very nature God is life. He is the life-giver and life-sustainer. He alone has life in His essence and life in His fullness. Life in infinite quality and life in infinite quantity.

God's life never ceases. It will never have an end. God cannot not be. Being God, everything about Him is eternal. His love, His power and His wisdom, His glory and all of His other perfect attributes. In ultimate concession God the Father send God the Son the Eternal word in to this world to be born, die, and raised to life again.

Following the Lord's ascension He in turn sent God the spirit to move hearts of stone and move them into hearts of flesh. We know not why (excepting undeserved grace and love), we know not how (it is a mystery) but Christians do know that when glorious change occurred. His amazing grace sought us out, found us and we have experienced this truth personally which goes far above anyone's understanding of it. It is simple yet profound God given and God-saving.

Then where does this live of God enter those who put their faith and trust in Him? It enters our hearts, our minds, our spirits, our very being, all that makes people people. And it comes from God's nature and life.

Ephesians 2 verse 1 "As for you, who were Dead in your transgressions and sins." Diagnosis: Dead but "Whoever believes in the Son has the Eternal life." (John 3:6) - Remedy: Life. What makes these two facts polar opposites? The former fully dead in our sins to fully alive in Christ by His grace. Or to but it more succinctly once

again the life of God in the soul of a man.

What must we do in the interim between our collective spiritual heart start and collective Heart Stepping? Build the command of the Angel of the Lord who told the two Mary's "come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his Disciples He is risen from the Dead" (Matthew 28:6-7).

Come and See then Go and Tell, these are the marching orders given to all Christians: the life of God in the soul of a man is to be shared by word of mouth and experience by others through God's Word working in their hearts. The life of God and through much prayer Christians are called, commanded and commissioned to herald the Good News as they are sent into culture as His ambassadors with a great and glorious message from the King of Kings. That requires knowing your audience, becoming savvy about your faith and the world and then knowing how to relate the two. The Apostle Paul was a master of this as he very effectively reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue. He refuted the

philosophers and he debated many diverse groups with different beliefs. In the market place he didn't stand from pulmone, he didn't pull up the drawbridge and retreating from culture. Nor did he 2. Conform to Culture by blending in chameleon-like. He did not let the world squeeze him into its mould. Sometimes he would 3. Combat Culture in so far as its will and ways militated against God's. He like we are to be salt and light. Salt to prevent decay and light to dispel the darkness. These words must be obeyed and personalized "Now get up and stand on your feet, I have appointed you as a witness to you as a servant and a witness. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (see acts 26:16-18).

This is the "life of God in the soul of man" for Christians and the "life of God in the souls of men" for those who are not. If any of you struggle with questions and issues of life contact me at gtmhuck@hotmail.com.

Mandatory minimum sentences were bad idea

When it comes to Canada's criminal justice system, the popular political play in recent years has been to follow our American neighbours and mimic their embrace of "tough on crime" laws with hard and fast rules for mandatory minimum punishments.

The election of Justin Trudeau's Liberals signalled Canadians were ready to rethink the wide range of ironclad minimum sentences. That's a good thing in light of a recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling.

A majority of the high court ruled in a decision recently that the mandatory one-year prison sentence prescribed for drug trafficking for someone with a previous trafficking conviction amounted to cruel and unusual punishment under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, writing for the majority, said the minimum sentence cast too wide a net, snagging not just serious drug traffickers

but also those involved in conduct "much less blameworthy." Canadians would be shocked by its potentially broad application, she wrote.

The ruling does not mean that all mandatory minimums in Canadian law violate the Charter. Six past decisions found mandatory minimums are not by themselves unconstitutional.

The majority advised, though, that Parliament should consider narrowing

the reach of mandatory minimums. That - combined with a 2015 ruling that quashed the three-year mandatory minimum sentence for some gun-related crimes -- means the Liberals are on the right track with a review of recent changes in the justice system.

Mandatory minimum sentences sound like a good idea in theory, but Canadians know that the application of justice can be uneven. One need only look at the disproportionate number of First Nations people in the system to know that all is not right.

Statistics Canada reported violent crime continued to drop across the country in 2014 and that serious crime was at its lowest level since 1969. Yet the federal prison population grew by 10 per cent between 2005 and 2015, according to correctional investigator Howard Sapers 2014 annual report.

Nobody wants someone found guilty of a serious crime such as murder to walk away consequence free. That's not justice.

But the problem with applying mandatory minimum sentences to a wide range of minor crimes is that it sets up a straightforward equation with no room for variables.

Commit crime X and face the punishment of Y number of years in jail or prison. That makes for easy sound bites, but that calculation does not automatically add up to justice either.

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"With the help of Gino's book Eat Smart, Eat Often, Eat Small and Matt's expert direction I have lost 25lbs, gone down 3 dress sizes and most importantly relieved my back pain. Thank You G&M!" Shelly L.

"I haven't been this happy with my body, and myself, in many years and I have Gino and Matt to thank for that." Lynn L.

"Gino and his staff are dedicated fitness instructors that focus on each and every individual's needs to help them achieve their goals." Angelo A.

"I went from 230lbs down to a lean 160lbs due to

Gino's expertise in nutrition." Lee R.

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"The atmosphere as you enter the club is warm and friendly, one of camaraderie. There have been a lot of improvements in the new location. The 24 hour access is by far the most valuable improvement to date. Thank you Gino, Matt and staff for all your years of dedication and service." Carol D.

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LOCAL NEWS

Trade zones have limited impact, so far

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Niagara's new status as a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) Point will make the region more attractive to investors, but no change won't happen overnight.

Other areas across the country that have been designated FTZ have seen limited success as a result.

The designation announced this month — the culmination of a decade of work by local economic development organizations — gives the region a competitive edge in luring investment, by offering easier access to government programs allowing qualified companies to defer duty to defer taxes and tariffs charged on goods being imported.

In 2008, a free trade zone was established in Winnipeg as a pilot project.

And in the eight years since, CentrePort spokesperson Riva Harrison said, three new customs bonded warehouses have set up shop in Manitoba's capital city as a direct result of the designation.

"I'm going to call it a moderate level of success," she said.

One of the new warehouses in CentrePort imports specialty beers and ciders, usually from European countries, she said. The products are stored at the warehouse and then distributed throughout North America.

A foreign trade zone was designated in Regina last August, called the Global Transportation Hub.

Since it has only been in place for eight months, Global Transportation's spokesperson Kelly Brossart isn't surprised the hub has yet to see a new industry set up shop there.

"It's important for people to realize that decisions to invest millions of dollars in an opportunity are not made very lightly, and they do take a long time to come to fruition," she said. "There are a number of opportunities that we are working on."

Nevertheless, she said it has made Saskatchewan's capital city more attractive to foreign investors.



Niagara Centre MP Vance Badaway chats with the crowd following an announcement about a Foreign Trade Zone in Niagara in St. Catharines on Friday, April 15. Niagara's new status will help foster private sector investment in the region and create jobs by providing access to government programs that defer or eliminate duties and taxes from products destined for export.

"It does offer them that eligibility for the different programs that the federal government offers, like tariff and tax exemptions and duty deferrals," she said.

For potential investors, having an FTZ designation is "one of the key items on the checklist."

"It definitely keeps a geography from being excluded from consideration, because it is something that the foreign investor is looking for," Brossart said.

Despite the limited success,

Harrison said Winnipeg's FTZ remains "an important tool to have in terms of marketing for business attraction and foreign investment" along with other incentives and amenities — not unlike Niagara's Gateway Economic Zone status.

She said the FTZ was established as a pilot project, to find a way to make it easier for industries to take advantage of federal government programs that can help reduce or eliminate tariffs and taxes on imported goods. Although

those programs had been previously available, she said very few companies applied for them because they were too complicated, involving too many government departments.

"It just seemed to be more trouble than it was worth," she said.

But the FTZs were geared towards making access to those programs easier for companies by creating a task force to fast track applications for companies, and marketing the benefits of the programs.

"This is a new, more centralized approach where it allows a jurisdiction to market it, to have sort of a single-window approach for applications, to have a task force with the expertise to go through the applications and advise companies."

Harrison said the FTZ programs aren't for everyone.

She said the program "isn't a one-size-fits-all" benefit that every company will be able to tap into. It will apply to very specific situations, which will have to be assessed on a case

by case basis."

Niagara is the seventh region to receive the designation.

Last June, two FTZs were established in Alberta, including one at the Edmonton airport and the second in Calgary.

An FTZ was created in Halifax a month later, and Port of Sydney in Nova Scotia was designated in February this year.

ABENNER@postmedia.com
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JULIE JOCSEN/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Early start for POCOMAR

Port Colborne Marine Auxiliary Rescue (POCOMAR) had an early start to the season, with its volunteers rescuing a family aboard a disabled boat April 16 just outside of Sugarloaf Marina. Captain of the rescue unit, Ted Cook, the rescue vessel's secondary vessel, a 24-foot fibreglass boat which has been in the water for a few weeks, raced out to the scene.

A young family on a 26-foot Bayliner was safely towed back into the marina, unit commander Norm Dashwood said. There were no injuries.

"This is the earliest in the season that POCOMAR, a member of the Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary, has ever been called out to a vessel in distress. However, with the weather we have had this year it's not all that surprising," said Dashwood.

On April 16, POCOMAR began 24/7 pager watch and will be responding to distress calls until mid to late November.

Boaters in distress can get help by calling the Coast Guard on channel 16 on a VHF radio or *46 from a mobile phone.

They can also call Trenton directly at 1-800-267-7270.

Kormos not forgotten

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

It has been three years since Welland MPP Peter Kormos died, but friends and politicians have not forgotten him.

A tribute and reception was held last Wednesday at Queen's Park in Toronto to remember the inspirational politician.

Each party had the opportunity to talk about the New Democrat during the tribute.

Welland MPP Cindy Forster spoke fondly about her friend and fellow New Democrat during the tribute. She spoke about the caring side of Kormos.

"I spoke about the guy who bought all these groceries at the market and then he would give them away because he knew there was a family in need or there was a strike going on," she said.

Forster recalled Kormos was always working for the "little guy." She said regardless of who didn't agree with what he had to say, Kormos would consistently stick up for people who couldn't stand up for themselves.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Politicians, friends and family paid tribute to NDP MPP Peter Kormos last Wednesday at Queen's Park in Toronto.

"His tenacity and people remember him as being tenacious. They respected him because he did his homework, and he knew what he was talking about when he got up to speak. Whether they agreed with him or didn't agree with him, they respected him,"

Forster said.

Members of Kormos' family also had a chance to speak at the tribute. His aunt Helen Kormos Brown spoke about what he was like as a child.

"She remembered some of his antics as a teenager. Closing remarks were that

she finally realized after his memorial three years ago, that he wasn't just part of her family, he was actually part of everyone's family," Forster said.

Forster said it was a great event and there were about 50 people from the Welland riding.

"There were a lot of kind words spoken, not unlike at the time of his passing. He was an icon in the province of Ontario," she said.

Forster said many people wore Kormos' signature button-down white shirt with the sleeves rolled up. She said it was nice to see so many people dressed like that to show respect.

Niagara Falls NDP MPP Wayne Gates also attended the tribute. Gates said he has been to many tributes for other MPs who have passed away but Wednesday's tribute felt different.

There were a number of people from the riding itself. There was a real love for him," Gates said.

Gates remembered Kormos as someone who was respected and stood up for everything he thought was right.

"It was a real honour to be there. He was a friend for a long time," he said.

Gates said Wednesday was about saying thank you to Kormos. Gates said Kormos will never be forgotten.

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Voters say Queenston St. among worst roads

LAURA BARTON
Special to Postmedia Network

CAA's Worst Roads campaign doesn't just stop at listing the roads everyone complains about — it helps municipalities know which roads need the most attention.

"We believe it's important to let the Niagara community know how its voting has effected change," says Drew Chamberlain, CAA Niagara's president and CEO.

Last year's worst roads in Niagara were in Fort Erie, St. Catharines, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls. CAA Niagara has released an update stating when residents can expect to see improvements to those roads.

Stanley Avenue in Niagara Falls, fourth worst, subsequently had construction work done on it last year and any further work that needs to be done is set to be finished this spring.

The other roads on the list, however, don't have start dates for repair before 2017.

Dundion Road in Fort Erie and Queenston Street in St. Catharines, which were first and second respectively, will start getting repaired in 2017. Construction on Lakeshore Road in

Niagara-on-the-Lake will begin in 2018 and on Drummond Road in Niagara Falls in 2020.

"I encourage people to continue to vote because it is making a difference," Chamberlain says.

The 2016 Worst Roads voting campaign is well underway.

"We've seen a lot of engagement from Niagara residents," says Alex Pederson, CAA's public relations co-ordinator. "We are tracking votes and are well ahead of last year's vote count."

So far the top five list of repeat offenders, with only one new addition of Grantham Avenue, at last check the second road listed for St. Catharines.

The list seems to be repeating itself because construction for those roads hasn't yet started, Pederson said.

Queenston Street had moved its way up into the top spot for Niagara's list — as well as for all of Ontario. The list is open until April 29. Voters are asked to do a weekly draw for 100 CAA dollars and one draw for \$2,500 worth of gas.

To have a say in which roads deserve a spot on the list, go to www.CAA-WorstRoads.com.



Queenston Street between Price and Tasker streets in St. Catharines is in particularly poor condition.

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Johnny Depp, left, and Alice Cooper of The Hollywood Vampires play Seneca Niagara Casino July 9.

POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Depp's Hollywood Vampires to play Seneca

JOHN LAW
Postmedia Network

at the Seneca Niagara Casino, with tickets starting at US\$50, on sale today at noon.

Capacity for the show will be about 5,100 people, according to a Seneca Casino spokesman. The stage will be set up in the parking lot across from the hotel entrance, near Niagara and Falls streets.

Other summer shows announced this week for Seneca include Counting Crows and Matchbox Twenty's Rob Thomas Aug. 13 (tickets start at US\$35), and a Sept. 3 date with the reunited Culture Club — part of the iconic '80s band's first tour in 12 years (tickets start at US\$45).

Motown legend Smokey Robinson performs June 11 (US\$50), followed by Olivia Newton-John July 23 (US\$45). Tickets for all shows are on sale at SenecaCasinos.com, www.ticketmaster.com or by phone at 1-800-745-3000.

Johnny Depp is heading to Niagara Falls, N.Y., and he's bringing his guitar with him. The *Pirates of the Caribbean* star will play an outdoor show July 9 outside Seneca Niagara Casino with his new 'superband' The Hollywood Vampires. Also featuring Alice Cooper and Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry, the band performed at the Grammy Awards in February.

Inspired by a celebrity drinking club co-founded by Cooper on the Sunset Strip in the late '60s, the band released its self-titled debut album in September last year.

The Seneca date will be the band's only local appearance. The night before they will play Casino Rama in Orillia.

The show will be on an outdoor stage

LOCAL NEWS

A purple reign we all bowed to

You may not recognize greatness at first listen, but genius? That's hard to miss.

It doesn't matter what your taste is. What type of music you follow. When you hear something so beyond what anyone else is doing, you don't question it. You don't doubt it. You just bear witness to it.

In 1984, the caverman-infested halls of my high school were purely zoned heavy metal. If you liked any other kind of music, you kept it to yourself. Want to fit in? Wear a Judas Priest shirt. Listen to Michael Jackson? Beat it. No dude admitted they owned *Thriller*, even though all of them did.

If you were a guy, you fought this primitive system at your own peril. Risking permanent ridicule. But around 1988, I decided to fight the power. That's when I heard Prince's *When Doves Cry* for the first time and could be silent no longer.

Listen to this song, I told them. Just LISTEN to it. There has never been anything else like it. It has no bass. It has no chorus. It starts with a guitar solo and ends with a synthesizer solo. He plays everything himself. It's one of the most brilliant songs I've ever heard, how do you not hear it?

My plea fell on deaf ears. You were a combination of lame and/or gay if you liked Prince. Case closed.

But not for me. Cool or not, I scoured record stores for Prince's old and new records. *Controversy* and *1999*. I heard the *When Doves Cry* video off TV so I could watch it whenever I wanted, which was about 10 times a day. I counted down the days until *Purple Rain* opened, even dragging my dad who wouldn't know Prince from Luther Vandross.

Alas, *Purple Rain* was a terrible movie. But that soundtrack? Mindblowing. The greatest album of the '80s. If Michael Jackson was the decade's biggest pop star, Prince was its Mozart. Talent almost beyond comprehension.

That's why it isn't just the dove crying.

In a year already cruel for who it has taken from us, news of Prince's death last Thursday at 57 felt like piling on. Over. Prince had enough, 2016. Give it a rest. Except ... 2017 is going to be just like 2016. And 2018 may be even worse. Losing Lemmy, David Bowie and Glenn Frey within a few months of each other this year hammered home the painful truth that while their music is ageless, the artists that made them aren't. They are seniors. Their bodies are failing. Their time with us is winding down.

We are going to lose Paul



JOHN
LAW

McCartney at some point soon. Bob Dylan. Mick Jagger. Yes, even Keith Richards. We will be stunned at the news for each and every one, just as we are today.

Whether they're 57, 77, or 87, it will always feel "too soon." Like losing family. Because many of them were the soundtrack to mundane moments that stick with us. I remember hearing *Kiss* while visiting a friend in the hospital. I remember playing *Raspberry Beret* and *America* while DJ-ing my high school dance. I remember my mom letting me drive the car alone for the first time ... shortly after getting my licence ... and my dad buying Prince's *LoveSexy*. Little moments that add up to so much.

Like many Prince fans, I drifted away from him in the '90s. He changed his name to a weird symbol. The albums weren't as good. We looked for the next Prince instead of listening to the old one.

But there wouldn't be a next one. And slowly, we were reminded of his brilliance. Songs buried on albums like *Musicology* and *3121* had that old spark. His Superbowl halftime show in 2007 was a stunner. His tours became a big deal again. Prince never changed, and that's precisely the reason we came back to him again.

Here in Niagara Falls, our connection was even more unique. Denise Mathews was a local beauty queen before heading to Los Angeles to seek stardom, eventually catching Prince's eye backstage at the American Music Awards. In 1982, he re-branded her Vanity and produced *Vanity*'s debut album. He essentially made a female version of himself.

They had a falling out — *Vanity* was asked to be the lead singer to star in *Purple Rain* — but Prince still carried a torch for her. When Mathews died on Feb. 15, Prince took the stage that night in Melbourne and dedicated a medley of *Little Red Corvette* and *Dirty Mind* to her. "Her and I used to love each other deeply," he said. "She loved me for the artist I was. I loved her for the artist she was trying to be."

Two months later, we're reminded once again life is just a party, and parties weren't meant to last.

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Niagara deaths tied to fentanyl

KAREN WALTER
Postmedia Network

Two people in Niagara have died in the past six weeks tak-

ing fentanyl illegally, as police continue to try and get the deadly prescription painkiller off the streets.

"It's an incredibly fatal

drug," said Niagara Regional Police Chief Jeff McGuire during a police services board meeting last Thursday.

McGuire said there have been about 500 deaths across the country and a number of fatalities in Niagara in addition to the illicit use of fentanyl in the past five years, including the two recent deaths.

"It's an incredible problem," he said.

So much so that the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police launched a website earlier this year with Humber College to deal with the fentanyl crisis. The site at www facethenyl.ca provides information about the drug's effects, signs of overdoses and where to get emergency medication to combat it.

"If anyone is interested or knows anyone involved in this particular type of drug or needs further information, there are all sorts of resources on that site to try and bring this epidemic, which is what it's become, to an end," McGuire said.

In addition to the fatalities, Niagara has seen a string of robberies at pharmacies where fentanyl is being stolen and sold illegally.

The drug is said to be stronger than morphine, more addictive than heroin and potentially fatal in minutes.

Earlier this month, the morality unit conducted an investigation into trafficking of fentanyl in Niagara and seized \$4,700 worth of fentanyl patches along with other drugs and cash.

In January, Grimsby district police launched an investigation into prescription fraud in which fentanyl patches were obtained.

While fentanyl is still impacting Niagara, police are also keeping their eyes open for the next possible drug crisis, the even more deadly W-18.

Billed 100 times more lethal than fentanyl, the synthetic opioid has surfaced in Alberta. McGuire said both the Canadian and Ontario associations of chiefs of police are aware of it.

"It is a very dangerous drug that's come forward and we are aware of it at the law enforcement community," he said.

"We haven't seen it here yet but it is extremely dangerous."

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LOCAL NEWS

Fentanyl bust nets 30-month jail term

ALISON LANGLEY
Postmedia Network

Fentanyl is such a dangerous drug that substantial jail terms are needed for dealers in order to deter like-minded individuals, a judge said last Thursday.

"A strong message needs to be sent," Judge Nathalie Gregson said in Ontario Court of Justice in Welland.

"Protection of our society from dangerous drugs is paramount."

Krista Curtis, 34, was sentenced to 30 months behind bars on charges of possession of a substance for the purpose of trafficking and breach of recognition.

The St. Catharines resident had pleaded not guilty to the charges and was found guilty following a trial in October.

Curtis was arrested after police found her in possession of four fentanyl patches which were hidden in the folds of her stomach.

Court heard Curtis had a valid prescription for the drug and feels she was wrongly convicted. The judge said the woman's substance abuse issues "lead her to a life of crime," although the defendant maintains she is not addicted to drugs.

The federal prosecutor had been seeking a jail term in the

range of four to six years while defence lawyer Mark Evans had argued for a sentence on the lower end of that scale in light of his client's difficult childhood and the modest amount of drugs she was caught with.

"I do have empathy for Ms. Curtis," the judge said. "Both her parents had substance abuse issues."

Gregson added the fact Curtis was previously convicted of a similar drug offence was "troubling" as the time she spent behind bars did not stop her from returning to drugs once she was released.

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LOCAL NEWS

No hepatitis cases in Niagara after berries recall

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

Berries linked to a large hepatitis A recall were held out as samples at the St. Catharines Costco on March 23.

In its public health notice on the outbreak, the Public Health Agency of Canada lists other sampling dates at Costcos in Ontario, Quebec and eastern Canada.

Last week, Niagara Region Public Health warned of a food recall by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency due to possible hepatitis A contamination.

The product in question is Nature's Touch Organic Berry Cherry Blend. Its best-before dates are up to and including March 15, 2018.

About 15 cases of hepatitis A linked to the product have

been reported in Canada, including 12 in Ontario.

There were no confirmed cases in Niagara as of last Friday afternoon, the public health office confirmed.

"I wouldn't say I'm worried per se, but it is certainly possible (a regional case) could happen," said Dr. Mustafa Hirji, Niagara's associate medical officer of health.

His concern is the nature of a hepatitis infection is that it can take a month or as long as 50 days before an infected person becomes ill. "There's a long lag time until we see cases, so there's quite a ways to wait."

He said, "we are not seeing a lot of infections coming out of this," Hirji said. "The risk is relatively low."

People who consumed the recalled frozen berries sometime after April 5 are



advised to give Niagara's public health department a call.

"They may be able to get a

vaccination which can prevent them from getting ill," said Hirji. "The risk is low, but a free, safe vaccine can

make it even lower."

Symptoms include an initial fever followed by fatigue and loss of appetite, plus

nausea and vomiting. A few days after that, yellowing of the skin and of the whites of the eyes can follow.

Anyone with this product in their home is advised to not consume it but return it to Costco for a refund, or throw it out.

Meanwhile, Costco is working with public health units across the province to have hepatitis vaccines available for Ontarians. In-store locations are holding free hepatitis A vaccine clinics for people affected by the recall. In St. Catharines at the North Service Road store, a clinic takes place today from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/1StqRzT>.

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Matt Johnston shows some Niagara IceDogs team spirit at Meridian Centre in St. Catharines.

IceDogs fever heating up

DON FRASER
Postmedia Network

They are "make them see red" T-shirts to set downtown spirits on fire.

This, as the Niagara IceDogs carry on a blistering season with wins Thursday and Saturday against the Barrie Colts in the Eastern Conference finals of the Ontario Hockey League.

"Those shirts have been going like crazy," said Matthew Johnston, the IceDogs' director of business operations. "People love them, and that's what we're hoping for, that whole arena to be red," Johnston said of the shirts sold at cost at the team's retail store.

"They just love the playoffs," Johnston said. "We've sold out the last three games. Monday and Wednesday are also going to be sold out — there's no doubt in my mind," he said on the weekend.

"The split around the city has been just phenomenal," he said.

Martine Peters at Kuly's Original Sports Bar on St. Paul Street can only laugh when asked about IceDogs fever at her establishment. It screens games inside to pumping up fans.

"It's been amazing, we have lines out the door most games," said Peters, a server there. "People are calling in

to see if they can make reservations — but there's no reservations on IceDogs nights."

Peters said Kuly's has tables of games regulars who provide enthusiastic familiar faces there through the season.

The atmosphere is "busy, but it's amazing," she said. "There's a quick rush, everyone comes in." But the food all gets out on time and nobody's waiting."

Kuly's patron Mark Hoenig has noticed the IceDogs buzz in town as well.

"Obviously it's exciting to see that they're in the playoffs," Hoenig said. "You see all the (team) banners on the windows walking around."

The Bull BBQ Pit, located near a Meridian Centre walkway, is also firing up all cylinders during IceDogs games.

"They pack the whole downtown core, everybody's coming," said owner Omar Fawzy.

Their chow of choice at his restaurant is "ribs, pulled pork and some meatloaf," he said.

The only holdups around here are at the Meridian and Barrie Molson centres.

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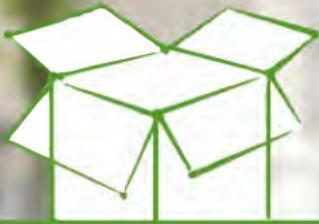
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Please note: All categories do not have to be fully completed.

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LOCAL NEWS

Cats shipped to SPCA

MICHELLE ALLENBERG
Postmedia Network

Twenty cats were meowing as they took off down at Niagara Central District Runway Airport in Welland on Saturday evening.

A small plane loaded with cats travelled from Kenora, Ont., to Welland as part of a partnership between the Welland and District Humane Society and the Kenora Cat Shelter.

The cats were transported to Niagara to help with an overflow Kenora is dealing with. Kenora doesn't have an SPCA, so a group of volunteers manage the cat shelter. They dedicated their time to rescuing stray cats and ensuring they find homes for them.

Last year representatives from the humane society travelled to the cat shelter

up north and brought two cats back to Niagara, along with a couple of dogs. Since that experience, animal care manager Tammy Gaboury said she has been hoping to bring more animals back to Niagara.

"It's been our hope we could eventually bring more cats. They currently have 144 cats in their shelter," Gaboury said.

Executive director John Greer said the humane society is happy to be helping "our friends in the north." Greer said the Kenora is underserved and the closest SPCA is Thunder Bay, which is about a four-hour drive from the community.

Gaboury said the Welland animal shelter is empty right now, so this is the perfect time to bring cats from other areas to Niagara. What has contributed to the low num-



Ryan Hurrman, an officer with Welland and District Humane Society, left, hands executive John Greer one of 20 cats that made a flight from Kenora to Welland on Saturday. The humane society is helping with an overpopulation of felines in the northern community that will be put up for adoption.

bers of cats in the shelters is the great spay and neuter programs, she added.

"We are extremely low

right now. We are starting to see what spay neutering is actually doing for our community and every year we

have seen a decrease in our intake, which is wonderful. It gives us the opportunity to help other shel-

ters who are struggling with overpopulation," Gaboury said.

The humane society partnered with the charity Pilots N Paws Canada to transport the 20 cats safely to Niagara. The charity is made up of a group of volunteers who give up their time to fly animals from remote places to other locations where the animals can be treated for adoption. The charity also transports wildlife which need to be relocated.

"It's a great excuse to fly and do some good at the same time," said volunteer pilot Ross Magnaldo.

He said the flight on Saturday was all right, but it was a bit smelly near the end.

"We had a few meows, but they settled down," he quipped.

MAllenberg@postmedia.com



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LOCAL NEWS

Welland looking into 'substandard housing'

ALLAN BENNER
Postmedia Network

Welland will consider developing a bylaw for the licensing of rental properties after representatives of Strategy To End Poverty Niagara urged city council to take action to ensure tenants won't have to live in substandard apartments.

"It's evident that the health and safety of tenants is directly related to the condition of the rental property," said STEP Niagara member Caroline Fast at last week's city council meeting.

She asked council "to take a proactive approach in addressing the substandard housing conditions that are likely to adversely effect the residents of the rental properties."

Other municipalities have already developed policies for licensing rental properties, and Thorold is now in the process of developing a similar bylaw, Fast said.

"We're not reinventing the wheel here. Licensing rental housing has been implemented and proven effective in London, Oshawa and Mississauga."

In addition to improving the quality of life for the tenants, she said it "makes good economic sense to ensure the value of city housing stock does not decrease" by ensuring owners keep their properties maintained.

Anthony Gatti from STEP Niagara said it's a "win" for the residents, for the owners of the homes, for the city and for the neighbourhoods, "at a very high cost."

He said licensing rental properties does not rely on upper levels of government to implement.

"It's something we can do on our own, working as a team, with no interference from other levels of government," he said.

Ward 4 Coun. Pat Chiocchio said the city has considered licensing rental hous-

ing several times as way to address student housing problems in neighbourhoods surrounding Niagara College.

He said the city's city and gown committee, which deals with student housing concerns, recently established a subcommittee to research ways of developing city policies for the licensing and regulation of rental properties.

Ward 6 Coun. Jim Larouche said it's not uncommon for councillors to receive phone calls from tenants, desperately concerned about the condition of the apartments they're renting.

He referred STEP Niagara's presentation to city staff for consideration.

Fast said her organization will return to council in months to come, bringing additional recommendations forward to help lift residents out of poverty.

"We need to acknowledge that the persistence of poverty in Canada is a violation of human rights," she said.



Ward 4 Coun. Pat Chiocchio

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IN
BRIEFInquest into jail
death set for May

A date has been set for an inquest into the death of an American man who died at Niagara Detention Centre.

Joseph Charles Dunn, 43, was in the custody of Canadian Border Services Agency at the Thorold jail

when he died Sept. 27, 2014.

Dunn had been indicted in Georgia earlier that month on charges of child cruelty in connection with the death of his 20-month-old foster son in Locust Grove, south of Atlanta. He fled to the Niagara border and filed a refugee claim in Canada.

The inquest will examine events surrounding Dunn's death. A jury may make recommendations in an effort to prevent similar deaths.

It will begin Monday, May 2, at 9:30 a.m. at the Welland Courthouse at 102 East Main St. The inquest is expected to last five days and will hear from approximately 10 witnesses.

Regional coroner for inquests Dr. David Eden will preside as inquest coroner and Graeme Leach will be counsel to the coroner.

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Brock, college team up for video games

LAURA BARTON
Special to Postmedia Network

Students interested in designing and programming video games have the opportunity to take a new program through Brock University and Niagara College.

Starting September, the simultaneous university and college education will earn students who take the GAME program both a university degree and a college diploma in one four-year program.

Linds Roote, associate dean of Niagara College's school of media studies, says the program has been in the works for many years.

"The industry needs people with a combination of that kind of university, kind of conceptual, broad thinking of games and a set of skills that they would get at college," she says, explaining this university-college mesh will prepare students to be specialists in specific areas of game development.

The current game development program at the college is what Roote refers to as a "gen-

eralist" program. It teaches a bit of design and programming with a dose of management skills.

All of this amounts to being able to do something like produce a indie game. It's also good for students unsure on which area of gaming they'd like to focus.

This new program will narrow down the different parts of gaming and allow students to specialize in one area or the other.

Brock professor Michael Winter, director of the GAME program, says it came about because of two of his colleagues, Jean Bridge of the visual arts and David Hughes of the computer science program.

These two professors recognized a lack of focus for teaching about the gaming industry. Each of their programs dabbles a bit in the gaming, but there isn't anything specifically for gaming itself.

Because of the gaming program already available at Niagara, he says the partnership was a natural.



Michael Winter is director of the GAME program at Brock University, which is partnered with Niagara College for a course on designing and programming video games.

BOB TYMCZYSZYM/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Brock will be providing much of the theory and background courses to accompany Niagara College's hands-on training.

"It's a really good mixture of theory and practice."

Students who wish to pursue game design will be taking courses that will lead them to a bachelor of arts degree, while

those who focus on programming will earn a bachelor of science degree.

The design and programming students aren't completely separate from each other, though. For instance, after first year, the two sides of the GAME program have a course together each year to jointly create a game.

Brock and Niagara will have computer labs for the students to work in. The college already has its gaming labs, and according to Winter one of the labs at the university is being renovated to accommodate this new program and "mirror" Niagara's set up.

Brock is in charge of handling all of the administrative fuss that comes with post-secondary application and attendance. Students must apply through the Ontario Universities' Application Centre and choose Brock to find the program.

Applications for this inaugural year are already through the roof. More than 350 people have applied for the 50-student program.

"I was actually at least a little bit expecting this," Winter says. "It's a topic students are very interested in nowadays."

To narrow it down, students who applied had to include a statement of interest. From there a joint committee between the two schools reviewed those applications to determine who was really interested in making games as opposed to playing them.

Winter says one of the hopes for the program is that students who graduate will stay in the area and help the multimedia and gaming industry in Niagara.

Both he and Roote feel the combined degree-diploma status will make students very employable.

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